

Letter from Alexander Graham Bell to Mabel Hubbard Bell, November 13, 1887, with transcript

ALEXANDER GRAHAM BELL TO MABEL (Hubbard) BELL Edgartown, Massachusetts.
Sunday Nov. 13th, 1887. My dear May:

It is a comfort having a telegraph office right in the house where I am staying. I don't feel now so very far away. I can reach you in a moment — and so you seem close at hand. The telegraph however takes all the spirit out of letter-writing — when I can telegraph you in a moment why should I spend time in writing a letter that will not reach you for days! The only trouble is the expense. It costs so much to say all I want. If I were only as rich as Croesus I would write you a good long letter every day and telegraph it all — cost what it might. I am sorry that the furnace still troubles you. I do not think it safe for you to stay in the house with that awful smell. Notify Fisher, the Real Estate agent, to have it rectified at once — and if they are not successful — why we shall have to move out — that is all. I am anxious to hear from you — but no letter has come yet — and — as you are not as rich as Croesus — your telegrams are unsatisfactory — microscopic doses of information — sufficient only to whet the appetite for more.

How is Charlie? How is Dr. Radcliffe — Elsie, Daisy — everybody?

I am staying in the old place I came to before — Capt. Osborne's house — dignified by the name of Ocean View Hotel. A queer place but I like it — and the people do their best to make me comfortable. The board is plain but good. My home breakfast is brought into my bedroom as at home. Dinner at half-past twelve — supper at half-past five. I starve so much however at night that I have asked to have a glass of milk and a slice of bread and butter left for me in the dining room — for night use if the spirit moves me — or rather the flesh. Mr. Hitz is hard at work in the Probate office copying for me the wills of the ancestors of the deaf-mutes — and I am hard at work preparing genealogies for publication. Mr.

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C. E. Hubbard has sent me a press-copy book and I intend to take a press-copy of all completed material which I will forward to you to lessen the risk of accidental destruction by having both copies in one place. Please put all material sent into the portfolio marked "Completed Work." If you like to wade through it you can read it too. At all events you will see what I am working at — and how much I accomplish. I am rather startled by the amount of work ahead and by the fact that I can only do it here. There is so much that I don't think there will be much change of my visiting Chilmark at all at present. The descendants of the deaf-mutes must be included — but I think I better delay this till the last moment as they can be obtained at any time. Indeed I rather suspect that Mrs. Pratt would be able to manage this part by a personal visit better than I. She is too busy now however on other work to consider this now. As I work so well at night — I try to be in the open air as much as possible in the day time. We are having beautiful bright weather — and there is a delicious bracing feeling in the air — that reminds me of Cape Breton. I had a long walk with Mr. Pease yesterday searching for a stone. He had been told that there was a large boulder stone on the shore upon which the Indians used to sharpen their axes and arrowheads — and which still bore traces — of furrows and etc., on its surface. He had never seen it — and the description of its location was rather vague — so we determined to search for it. Just as we were about to abandon our search we found it. A stone — I should think about four feet long by two wide. Something of this shape.

There was round smooth hollows in it undoubtedly made articially — 3 and at one edge — indistinct striations — marks such as would be made by grinding arrowheads and etc., Today I have spent the whole day in the open air. In the morning I walked a mile or so out of town to the shore to see a large three-masted vessel that was wrecked here last April. She was at anchor off the shore during a storm when she parted her cables and drifted broadside onto the beach. She is very slightly injured and now lies in about two feet of water — practically high and dry. The Captain and a colored man stay by her night and day. I went on board and entered her comfortable cabin where they had a good fire lighted and chatted with the Captain — (Capt. Douglas) and Capt. Townsend the agent of some

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wrecking company, which hopes to get her off in a few days. They have a stout ten-inch-thick cable out to sea with a heavy anchor at the end, and are now waiting for a storm to come from the south to blow her off shore. When the gale appears they will bear on the anchor keeping the cable very tight — and they expect that — little by little — as the wind blows — and the stormy waves loosen the sand at her bottom — she will yield to the strain of the cable at her stern — and move out into deeper water. If I am here at the time — they will notify me when the attempt is to be made as I am anxious to see the process.

Of course she is leaky but they have a steam-engine on board and a steam pump is expected tomorrow. This pump is so powerful that (they say) they have actually pumped up bricks with it! — and as for coal — many is the wrecked vessel from whose hold they have pumped out the coal into the sea — as though it had been molasses or water! I shall be glad to see this wonderful pump with my own eyes and I shall look out with interest for its arrival.

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I hardly expected that my mother would attempt the long journey here. She will enjoy this place I am sure once she does arrive — and then — I will take care that she sees Dr. Hunter in New York on the way home. I expect them both tomorrow evening. Not Dr. Hunter of course — but Papa and Mamma.

This afternoon Mr. Hitz and I drove down to the south shore — tied the horse to a post at the deserted railroad terminus — and spent the afternoon on the beach. I hope you admire the results of my imagination — in my letter to the children. A fish with teeth on its tail! — and lips made of pearls! How is that!!!!

I leave Mr. Hitz to work in the Probate office and propose to drive to Cottage City with Mr. Pease in the morning (9 o'clock!?) so as to catch the Nantucket boat at Cottage city at ten o'clock on its way to Woods Hall. We go there by invitation of Mr. Forbes (father of the late

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President) to see and examine his beautiful steam yacht — and to dream of steam yachts of our own for better in every respect!

If I succeed in getting up — which may be doubtful seeing it is now Monday morning and past 2 A. M. — I will return to Edgartown in the afternoon by the boat from New Bedford (which calls at Woods Hall) upon which I expect to find Papa and Mamma. I rather guess they will be surprised to see me — although perhaps they know me so well as not to be surprised at anything I do! By the by — to change the subject — Talking of cats — not deaf cats — nor white beasts with blue eyes — but ordinary cats born of ordinary creatures — I have just heard of a curious monstrosity. A man in Boston has a cat which recently gave birth to a litter. Three of the kittens are fastened together by the tails! — a sort of Siamese Trim arrangement!

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They can run about now — and are being duly trained for exhibition in some dime Museum. The tip of the tail for about one inch and a half is common to the three.

I feel very much pleased that the Gallaudet Centennial Committee should have invited me to make the address. I hope however they will select some one else. I sent the following reply — (copy) Rev. Henry Winter Syls, Chairman of Committee on the Gallaudet Centennial Institution for the Deaf and Dumb. Philadelphia, Pa.

I feel much honored by the invitation of your Committee, but would suggest that some of the older members of the profession might from personal acquaintance and familiarity with the work of Gallaudet be more competent than I to make the address. I can only say that it would give me pleasure to assist in any way in my power to do honor to the memory of Gallaudet should the Committee at their formal meeting think it best to ratify your invitation.

You can telegraph me at Edgartown, Martha's vineyard, where I expect to remain ”

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And now I think I will startle the inhabitants by walking out in the dark to the post-office — so that my letter may leave Edgartown at six A. M. — then to bed.

Take care of yourself my little wife — No running off to New York in my absence! Obey your Lord and Master — and be patient.

Your loving husband, Alec. Mrs. A. Graham Bell, 1336 19th Street, Washington, D. C. P. S. Write without stopping.